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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3745  
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE 0777  
RUCNCLS/SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE  
RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0176  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 0886  
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 0090  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2010  
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 2344  
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHDC  
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC  
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC  
RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC  
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SENSITIVE  
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DEPARMENT FOR SCA/CEN, SCA/PPD, ECA, AND IIP

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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: ELECTION EVENTS RAISE AWARENESS OF AMERICAN  
DEMOCRACY

11. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

12. (U) SUMMARY: Mission Kazakhstan conducted a wide variety of events to raise awareness of the 2008 U.S. elections in Kazakhstan and underscore our commitment to democratic values. Activities included distributing election-related materials, hosting an election speaker, sending nine Kazakhstanis to the United States to view the democratic process first-hand, and organizing a variety of programs at American Corners throughout the country. Festivities culminated in election-day breakfast events hosted by the Embassy in Astana and the Branch Office in Almaty. Guests appreciated the opportunity to watch live returns and cast their ballots in a mock election. END SUMMARY.

ELECTION EVENT AT EMBASSY ASTANA

13. (U) On November 5, Embassy Astana hosted approximately 250 guests for an election day event. Beginning at 7:30 am local time (8:30 pm EST), the Embassy welcomed Kazakhstani guests and members of the diplomatic community to experience this year's historic election. The event was held in the Embassy's atrium, which was adorned with red, white, and blue decorations. Three televisions broadcast live returns, and one computer station provided internet updates. Guests were encouraged to take Democratic and Republican campaign paraphernalia as well as IIP-provided election materials. Foreign guests also participated in a mock election (the results: Senator Obama: 90 votes; Senator McCain: 11 votes).

14. (U) Guests started queuing outside the Embassy at 6:45 am. Presidential Advisor (and former Information and Culture Minister) Yermukhamet Yertysbayev, a Kazakhstani parliamentarian, several members of the Central Election Commission, and several officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs attended the event. Enthusiastic students, educators, alumni of U.S. government-sponsored exchange programs, and employees of non-governmental organizations comprised the majority of our guests, and a number of diplomats came as well.

¶15. (U) Attendees were largely familiar with the candidates, but had a limited understanding of the American electoral system. Many were surprised to learn that Americans were not just voting for president, but also for members of Congress, as well as on a wide range of state and local measures.

¶16. (SBU) The students overwhelmingly indicated support for Senator Obama, citing his "youth, energy, and focus on change." Or, as one said simply, "I like his smile." University administrators and educators preferred Senator McCain, however, citing his many years of public service and strong military credentials. "I like Obama, too," admitted one university administrator, "But he needs another 20 years of experience before becoming president." Azerbaijani Ambassador to Kazakhstan Lyattif Gandilov was particularly disappointed when Obama was declared the victor. He argued that McCain's experience was essential in these difficult times, and feared that Obama will change U.S. policy and officially recognize as a genocide the mass killings of Ottoman Armenians during the First World War.

¶17. (U) The Astana election event was covered by many national and local television companies, including Khabar TV, Kazakhstan TV, Rakhat TV, Astana TV, Channel 31, and Era TV. Print journalists included representatives from wire services (Interfax, Reuters, KazTAG) and newspapers (Panorama, Info-Tess, Izvestiya-Kazakhstan.) The journalists interviewed the Ambassador and were interested in learning what the election results would mean for U.S. policy. The Ambassador responded by reassuring them that major foreign policy changes regarding U.S. relations with Kazakhstan were not expected, no matter which party won.

¶18. (U) During a meeting later in the day, Minister of Information  
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and Culture Mukhtar Kul-Mukhammed congratulated the Ambassador on the U.S. election and described it as "a great festival of democracy."

#### ELECTION EVENTS AT BRANCH OFFICE ALMATY

¶19. (U) Branch Office Almaty hosted a parallel event for approximately 130 guests at USAID's offices. Live television feeds and computers with internet access provided up-to-the minute updates. Embassy staff further educated attendees about the election by showing biographical videos of the Democratic and Republic candidates, and by distributing a wide variety of IIP material and campaign paraphernalia.

¶110. (U) Foreign guests also voted in a mock election (Senator Obama: 62, Senator McCain: 10). One Kazakhstani opposition figure said he was so excited to watch democracy at work that he voted twice. The leader of "Pokoleniye," a pensioners' NGO, suggested inviting Senator Obama to be the next leader of Kazakhstan and sending Kazakhstani President Nazarbayev to the United States. Another contact sent a text-message that said "Obama 2030," a reference to the Government of Kazakhstan's grand development plans for the country by the year 2030.

¶111. (U) The Almaty-based press also covered the event. Journalists included representatives from Channel 31, KTK TV, Liter, Svoboda Slova, Ekspress K, zonak.net, stantv.kz, Kazinform News Agency, Radio Azattyk (RFE/RL), and Obshestvennaya Pozitsiya. As in Astana, journalists were particularly interested in what the election would mean for U.S. policy, particularly U.S.-Russia relations. Several were also interested in the mechanics of overseas voting, and one asked if the United States puts this event on "every year."

¶112. (SBU) The Almaty event had been scheduled to take place at the American Cultural Center, which is located at the National Library and is co-sponsored by Chevron. However, despite a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that commits the library to "conduct activities planned jointly with the U.S. embassy" and "provide free and open access to the center for everyone without restriction," the director of the library, Obynbasar Isakhov, objected to the inclusion on the guest list of leaders of the political opposition members and a representative of the Jehovah's Witnesses. (NOTE: This is just the

latest problem with the director, who has increasingly limited the center's activities, including refusing to grant access to an American Fulbrighter who had scheduled a talk there in April and restricting or removing cable television access. We are currently in the process of reviewing this MOU and exploring options to end the relationship with the National Library. END NOTE.)

#### AMERICAN CORNER FESTIVITIES

¶13. (U) All eight American Corners in Kazakhstan also engaged in election activity. Corners distributed election-related materials; organized presentations, discussions, and round-tables with election themes; and screened the candidates' biographies. Each Corner also organized a mock election. Voting began on October 28 and culminated on November 4. Votes were counted by agreed-upon election committees and relayed by phone to Embassy Astana during its November 5 election event. The results were then posted on a large map: 1170 foreign nationals voted at American Corners across Kazakhstan -- 966 for Senator Obama and 204 for Senator McCain. Nine Peace Corps volunteers and three alumni of U.S. government-sponsored programs provided invaluable support to the American Corners' election programs.

#### OTHER ELECTION PROGRAMS

¶14. (U) Other election-related activities included nominating Magzhan Ilyassov, head of the Presidential Administration's Foreign Policy Center, to observe the elections through the "I-Vote"

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International Visitors Leadership Program (IVLP); sending three Kazakhstani journalists to participate in events organized by the Foreign Press Center; sponsoring Swarthmore College political science Professor Carol Nackenoff to speak about the elections in Astana, Almaty, Karaganda, and Kostenai; and supporting five members of Kazakhstan's Central Election Committee in their travel to the United States to observe the elections firsthand.

HOAGLAND